

SENATE ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

SENATE, No. 3863

with committee amendments

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: NOVEMBER 20, 2023

The Senate Environment and Energy Committee favorably reports Senate Bill No. 3863, with committee amendments.

This bill, as amended by the committee, directs the Office of Green Acres in the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to establish a program for the acquisition of development easements, conservation restrictions or easements, or other restrictions or easements permanently restricting development on privately-owned woodlands.

The bill directs the Office of Green Acres, in consultation with the State Forester, to adopt rules and regulations to establish the program within one year after the date the bill is enacted into law. To be eligible for the program, the woodlands would be required to (1) be of at least five contiguous acres in size, and (2) be managed by the landowner in accordance with a forest stewardship plan approved pursuant to section 3 of P.L.2009, c.256 (C.13:1L-31) or a woodland management plan pursuant to section 3 of the "Farmland Assessment Act of 1964," P.L.1964, c.48 (C.54:4-23.3). A landowner would not be required to provide public access to woodlands preserved by the program.

In order to fund acquisitions under the program, the bill would establish a "Woodlands Protection Fund." The fund would be credited with: any federal funds made available for this purpose, including monies from the Forest Legacy Program administered by the United States Forest Service; any donations by private individuals or foundations received by the DEP for this purpose; any monies appropriated to the fund by the Legislature; and any return on the investment of moneys deposited in the fund.

The committee amendments to the bill direct the Office of Green Acres, in consultation with the State Forester (rather than the State Forester), to establish the program and to adopt the rules and regulations governing the program.